



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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The Healthy Journey

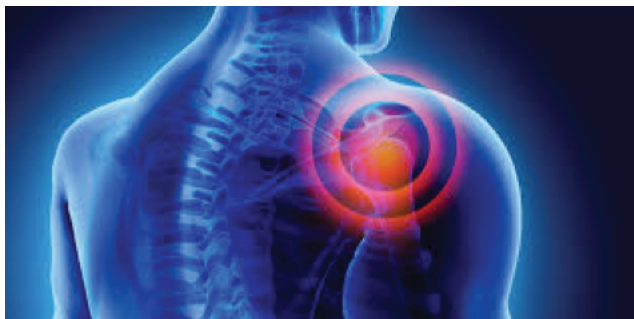
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Managing pain without opioids

By Allison Udris M.S. LCPC

Many people experience pain that negatively affects their quality of life. There are two different types of pain: acute and chronic. Many people rely on medications to treat these two types of pain. This article gives information on managing pain without the use of addictive medications called opioids.



Acute vs. Chronic Pain

Acute pain is sudden and has a specific cause. Some things that cause acute pain are sports injuries, a dental procedure, broken bones, cuts, burns, and childbirth. Acute pain is short-term. Once this pain goes away, people can continue their daily routines relatively pain-free. Doctors frequently prescribe opioids to treat acute pain, but they should only be taken for a short time (about 3 days). Afterward, patients are encouraged to switch to non-addictive, over-the-counter pain medications. Examples of these are Tylenol and Tylenol Extra Strength (acetaminophen). Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as Motrin (ibuprofen) also help. By the time a patient begins taking these over-the-counter medications, their acute pain is less severe.

Chronic pain is ongoing and lasts longer than the body's usual healing time (about 3 months). According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, chronic pain affects over 100 million Americans, more

than heart disease, diabetes, and cancer combined. Chronic pain can result from several conditions, such as headaches, poor posture, neck and back pain, arthritis, stress, diseases such as cancer, and being overweight. Additionally, pain can affect someone physically and emotionally.

*Opioids are drugs for treating pain.
Some are made from opium poppies.
Others use chemicals like opium poppies.*

What is an opioid?

Many people take medications called opioids to treat acute and chronic pain. Opioids are a type of drugs that come from the opium poppy. They relax the body and can relieve pain. Opioids slow down bodily functions such as breathing and heart rate. Examples of prescription opioid medications are oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), Percocet, codeine, and morphine. Illegal opioids include heroin and synthetic fentanyl.

Why are opioids dangerous?

Opioids are dangerous because they carry the risk of dependence, misuse, addiction, overdose, and death. About 1 in 4 individuals who take opioids for pain become dependent on the medication. This increases their risk of death. About 40% of opioid-related deaths are from prescription medications. In the United States, the opioid epidemic is a public health emergency. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported several statistics regarding pain and opioids for the year 2016:

- 116 people died every day from opioid-related drug overdoses
- 11.5 million people misuse prescription opioids
- The opioid epidemic cost American taxpayers 504 billion dollars

Additionally, adults over the age of 40 are more likely to abuse prescription opioids than adults ages 20-39. Women are more likely to abuse prescription opioids more often than men. Opioid medications can make people nauseas, tired, and constipated. Never mix opioids with alcohol (beer, wine, cocktails); it can be deadly.

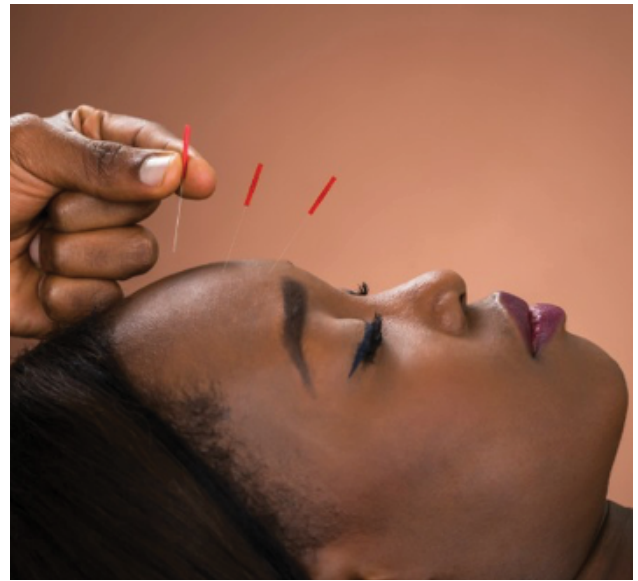
What are alternative therapies for pain relief?

Although there are healthy and legal alternatives to opioids to treat pain, it is important to know that these alternatives will not make pain go away completely. However, they can make pain more tolerable without dangerous side effects. The following options can be useful for treating pain:

Exercise: Light, low-impact exercises that help lessen pain include walking, stretching, swimming, and yoga. These exercises can correct poor posture, improve balance, strengthen muscles, and improve range of motion. Exercise helps reduce pain by triggering chemicals (called “neurotransmitters”) in our bodies. For example, pain reduces a neurotransmitter called serotonin, a chemical made in our bodies that affects mood and how strongly pain is felt. Exercise boosts levels of serotonin in the body, reducing the intensity of pain. Exercise also increases chemicals in our bodies called endorphins, which block pain and help people relax.

Physical Therapy: Health insurance may cover physical therapy, which can help lessen pain. Physical therapy uses different exercises to increase flexibility, coordination, range of motion, strength, and posture while mobilizing certain joints and tissues in the body. Physical therapy treatments may involve heat/cold or electrical stimulation for pain reduction. Physical therapists design a program specifically for you, assist you with exercises, and can educate you on why your pain occurs. Therapists can also give you tips for pain prevention.

Psychotherapy: Pain can lead to moodiness, sadness, anger, and frustration. It can also cause sleep problems and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Addressing your mental health is an important part of pain management. Studies have shown that psychotherapy can treat pain because it changes how your brain senses pain. Stress and worry can make pain worse. Therapists can design a treatment plan for you, and will help you understand how your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors affect pain. Also, therapists can teach people relaxation



and mindfulness strategies, mood management, coping tools, and ways to think differently about pain. Additionally, therapists can connect people to self-help materials and support groups.

Acupuncture: Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese technique used to treat pain and other medical problems. A licensed professional inserts tiny needles into the skin on different points around the body during an acupuncture session. Acupuncture is not painful, and you may even be able to fall asleep during a session. Acupuncture can also help balance hormones, calm the nervous system, and assist with poor sleep. Many private health insurance companies cover acupuncture, but Medicaid does not. However, there are community acupuncture clinics that offer acupuncture sessions without using health insurance. Community acupuncture clinics such as Govans Community Acupuncture offer acupuncture treatments on a sliding scale from \$15-\$40 (whatever the patient can afford) and does not require health insurance or income verification.

Community acupuncture clinics offer acupuncture in a group setting without requiring health insurance and offers appointments on an affordable sliding scale. Walk-ins are welcome, although you are also able to schedule an appointment in advance.

Govans Community Acupuncture
5209 York Road, Baltimore MD, 21212
410-905-2566

<http://www.govansca.com/>

Acupuncture: \$15-\$40 sliding scale, pay what you can



Baltimore Community Acupuncture
715 Frederick Road, Catonsville MD, 21228
443-986-0006

<https://acupunctureforall.com/>

Acupuncture: \$20-40 sliding scale, pay what you can

MEND Acupuncture
2700 Remington Avenue, Baltimore MD, 21211
410-235-1776

<http://mendacupuncture.com/remington/>

Acupuncture: \$25 fee, no sliding scale

The Well: Community Acupuncture and Wellness
42 E. Cross Street, Baltimore MD, 21230
443-600-4329

Acupuncture: \$25 fee, no sliding scale

Massage: Massage can help relieve pain by increasing levels of the natural pain relievers your body makes (serotonin and endorphins). Additionally, massage can help reduce swelling in the body, promote relaxation, lower anxiety, and increase range of motion. Massage is not considered a main treatment for reducing pain, but can help you feel better if you use it with other treatments.

Mindfulness: Some examples of mindfulness strategies are meditation and deep breathing. Some hospitals and pain clinics now prescribe meditation to help patients heal from pain and illness. Meditation is helpful because it allows people to relax and change their reaction to pain. Several studies suggest that people who meditate often have a higher pain tolerance than people who do not meditate at all. If you are interested in trying meditation, set a timer for 5 minutes, close your eyes, and focus on your breathing. Many people prefer guided meditations where an instructor speaks during an audio recording. If you prefer guided meditation, there are several free or affordable smartphone apps such as *Head-space*, *Meditation Studio*, and *Calm*.

Medical Marijuana: Medical marijuana, also called cannabis, has been used for centuries to relieve pain. Medi-

cal marijuana is made up of THC, cannabidiol, and cannabinoids. Cannabinoids are chemicals that block pain. To legally obtain medical marijuana in Maryland, you must first register as a patient with the Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission (MMCC). Once you have completed your registration, you must receive a written certification from a medical provider who is also registered with MMCC. This medical provider can document your health condition that is causing you to seek medical marijuana treatment. Finally, you can visit a licensed Maryland dispensary with a government-issued photo ID to purchase medical marijuana. For registration instructions, please visit the following website: http://mmcc.maryland.gov/Pages/process_to_obtain.aspx. For a list of licensed medical marijuana dispensaries in Baltimore, please refer to the HANDLS Referral Guide.

Where can you get help?

If you or someone you know abuses opioids and would like help, there are several resources for assistance:

The HANDLS Referral Guide:

<https://handls.nih.gov/ReferralGuide.pdf>

SAMHSA National Helpline: (800) 662-HELP or <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

Baltimore City Crisis Response – 24hr Mental Health & Substance Abuse Helpline: (410) 433-5175

Maryland Crisis Hotline: (800) 422-0009

Sources Used to Write this Article:

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The Quarterly Newsletter for the HANDLS Community Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the effects of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information that we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. We want to do this for people from all backgrounds, particularly those in poor and minority communities.

**For information about our study call 1-877-677-9538
or visit our website handls.nih.gov**

